

A Travesty of Bakunin

Review of "The Devil at the Long Bridge." By Riccardo Bacchelli. 7s. 6d.
London: Longmans, Green & Co.

Max Nettlau

May 1929

Bakunin's fair name, like everybody else's, is dear to all of us, and it has been cleared by most careful research from all the Marxian and other aspersions shoveled upon it in fanatical party strife. It has now become his lot to be defined from another side, by the book of an Italian author, Riccardo Bacchelli, which has been translated into English. I have not seen this book, but from what I have heard from various sides it purports to deal with events, partially private, in Bakunin's life during the years 1872–1874. Now, these events have been illustrated and explained by a large quantity of letters, private papers, and personal unrestricted statements of some of the most intimate participants in these events. This has been partly put in print or in polygraphic reproduction many years ago; partly it is produced and dissected in works not yet in print, but not unknown nor inaccessible to those who have a serious interest in this question, which, to the general public as well as to the Anarchist public, is of minor interest, indeed, and interests only the intimate historical students of that period.

All this material Bacchelli, from all one hears, does not consult, so what he produces cannot concern the real Bakunin, but only an imaginary manikin of his own creation. As historical novels in our time are loosely based on the most thorough documentation obtainable, the public ought to be made aware then that this novel is quite an exception to this.

This is very openly stated by Dr. Luigi Bakunin, a grandson of Michael Bakunin, in a letter printed—during his stay in Argentina—in the large Buenos Aires literary review, *Nosotros*, No. 235, December, 1928, pp. 416–418, which is an outburst of indignation against Bacchelli's proceedings. I will extract only these lines, not because I am mentioned in them, but because they state the facts as, from all I know, they appear to be, unfortunately:—

"I like to believe, for the dignity of the man and the author, that Bacchelli operates with full good faith, but let him accept advice and it is this, that before writing a historical novel he should attentively read history and give to this several hours of study every day. In the present case, he would have done well to read the history of the "International," by James Guillaume, and the biography of "Michael Bakunin," by Max Nettla, if not the writings of Bakunin himself. Let him read these, it is still time;

let him think them over, and he will see what an offence he has inflicted on truth, and he will certainly be the first to regret this.”

This will be sufficient to warn the English comrades against being influenced by this book, which they can repudiate by a sound instinct, but which they cannot control and verify as to assertions purporting to be facts, as the books and documents necessary for this so not exist in English editions. There is an abundance of real research work on Bakunin available now, mainly in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian, but indeed nothing at all in English. It is a bitter irony of fate that the publishers should first be attracted by the manikin which Bacchelli dubs with the name of Bakunin, but this is managed like this in this best of all possible best worlds.

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